



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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FISH HATCHERIES GEAR-UP FOR BUSY SEASON

CLEAR LAKE – State fish hatcheries are beginning the annual spring fish collection with the first northern pike entering the Guttenberg Hatchery Tuesday.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ fisheries staff collects northern pike from the Mississippi River shortly after ice out. As inland lake water temperature approaches 45 degrees, staff will turn their focus to collecting walleyes.

“We just started setting nets on Monday, and will increase the number as the week goes on,” said Scott Gritters, fisheries biologist with the DNR’s Guttenberg hatchery, who leads the annual pike collection from the near freezing backwaters of the Mississippi River. The DNR will collect about 60 female and 180 male northern pike to hatch out about 700,000 fish, called fry.

Most of the fry hatched from the northern pike collected at Guttenberg will either be returned to the backwaters of the Mississippi River or sent to the National Fish Hatchery at Genoa, Wis., and grown to fingerling size before being released. Of the remaining fry, an estimated 50,000 will be released in Saylorville Lake and another 10,000 will go to the Cedar River.

Other lakes and rivers will receive 140,000, 3-inch northern pike fingerlings, but those fish will come from pike collected from the lakes in Dickinson County, which is also a focal point of the walleye collection.

The DNR collects walleye from East and West Okobojo and Sprit lakes, as well as from Lake Rathbun, Storm and Clear lakes. The goal is to collect enough walleyes to hatch out about 106 million walleye.

“Clear Lake is about 70 to 80 percent ice free and based on the seven to 10 day forecast, I would guess that we would start in the first or second week in April,” said Jim Wahl, fisheries biologist with the DNR’s Clear Lake station. A crew from the Spirit Lake hatchery will install a water line Friday, which is part of the temporary hatchery constructed in the basement of the Clear Lake station each year.

Walleye collection happens at night, where entanglement nets are placed in traditional walleye spawning areas. Walleye collecting lasts from seven to 10 days, depending of nightly catches.

The Dickinson County lakes also supply eggs for the muskie program. Only about 500,000 eggs will be needed to fill the stocking requests for muskies.

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DEER HUNTERS DONATE DEER...BIGTIME

DES MOINES – Iowa’s deer donation program during the last hunting season surprised even Department of Natural Resources officials with a windfall of 6,344 deer given by hunters, almost 30 percent more than expected.

The DNR piloted the donation program in 2003 and 2004 to help reduce the deer population by giving hunters a place to donate deer so they would continue to shoot more. Last year, the legislature added \$1 to the cost of a deer permit to help pay for the program and expand it from just central Iowa to statewide.

“Deer hunters are to be thanked for their major contributions in providing highly popular venison to Iowans in need,” said Jeff Vonk, DNR director.

Vonk said that hunters donated deer at 88 locker locations in 60 counties throughout Iowa. Deer donated to the Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program, with distribution to the needy and coordinated by the Food Bank of Iowa, amounted to 5,608. At seven Iowa lockers, hunters could chose to donate deer to Iowa Department of Corrections facilities. That Prison Venison Program resulted in 736 deer going to five nearby prisons.

Vonk said more than 1 million quarter-pound servings of venison were received by Iowans through the network of food banks. About 135,000 venison meals were served at the prisons.

The extra \$1 on deer permits came up about \$42,000 short on paying from the program, but the DNR will pay the additional out of its regular budget. Lockers received \$60 per deer to process the venison for HUSH; the Food Bank of Iowa received \$5 per deer for distribution and administration; and the DNR spent about \$17,000 to promote the program.

The top lockers receiving the most deer included: Corning Meat Processing in Corning, 288 deer; Edgewood Locker in Edgewood, 270 deer; Country Meat Market in Granger, 270 deer; Milo Locker in Milo, 226 deer; and Crawford Locker in Wayland, 217 deer.

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BOAT OPERATORS TO FIND NEW RULES ON CERTAIN NORTH IOWA LAKES

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has adopted new rules for boaters on Dickinson County lakes and on Mud Lake on the Upper Mississippi River effective May 3.

A new nighttime speed limit of 25 miles per hour will be in effect on all lakes in Dickinson County beginning one-half hour after sunset and lasting until sunrise. The new speed limit is a result of local citizens getting involved and petitioning the DNR on the issue. The DNR responded to local citizens and held public meetings to discuss the issue and craft the current rule.

“These lakes are among the busiest in the state and much of that boat traffic occurs during late evening and nighttime hours. By placing a nighttime speed limit on these lakes, the message to boaters is slow it down,” said Lowell Joslin, chief of the Iowa DNR’s law enforcement bureau. “These lakes constantly busy during the summer and by restricting boaters at night to no faster than 25 miles per hour, we are hoping to prevent collisions and fatalities.”

Alcohol remains a major factor in nighttime boating collisions. Joslin said as a rule, boaters should not operate a watercraft faster than their ability or the conditions allow. “Just because we have a 25 mile per hour speed limit at night does not mean boaters should operate that fast. Operate according to the conditions,” he said.

Violators may be subject to fines and court costs totaling more than \$50.

Along the upper Mississippi River, boaters on Mud Lake will be facing a new no-wake zone, which will be marked by buoys placed by the Dubuque County Conservation Board. The no-wake zone was requested by the Dubuque County Conservation Board and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an effort to reduce the impact to the area from large vessels operating at higher speeds, causing shoreline erosion and excessive noise.

The rule defines the area between Mississippi River mile marker 587.6 to 589.3, in the backwater known as Mud Lake and designated by marker buoys, as the no-wake zone.

For more information, contact Rich Jordet, supervisor for DNR conservation officers covering northwest Iowa, at 712-336-1840.

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[Electronic photo available]

SNOW GEESE HEADING BACK NORTH

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Spring waterfowlers across Iowa have been watching the snow line through the upper Midwest, as snow geese push north, fall back, then head north again in a biological race to reach their sub-Arctic Hudson Bay nesting grounds.

“In some years, we get a ‘yo-yo’ effect; where the birds move north, then retreat,” notes Carl Priebe, wildlife biologist for the Department of Natural Resources in southwest Iowa. Even before this week’s blast of snow came through Nebraska and Iowa, they had seen geese returning as early as January.

The major corridor through the Missouri River flyway has been just *west* of Iowa. Still, tens of thousands still fly through, feed and roost on refuges in western Iowa. Workers estimate 15,000 to 20,000 snows were on the refuge at Riverton, Wednesday morning. A good share of the migration might already have blown through. At Mound City, south of the Iowa state line, 40,000 were reported. That number was 250,000 or more, a couple weeks ago.

Again this year, a federal conservation order encourages hunters to pull out the stops to harvest large numbers of ‘snows’. “They nest in large colonies, moving up and down the tundra, grazing on all the vegetation near the coast line,” explains Priebe. “They basically denude the entire area. It’s a hardship, not only for the snow geese themselves, but all the other birds using the tundra for nesting.” Biologists estimate that it will take decades for the fragile sub-arctic tundras to recover, even if the damage would stop immediately. It is not.

Hunters can take up to 20 snow geese each day and are allowed to electronic calls and unplugged magazines in their shotguns. Across North America, just over a million snow geese were being harvested each season for the last three or four years. Iowa's share of that is generally just a fraction; indicative of the changing migration patterns, but also the wariness of the big bird. With poor reproduction a couple seasons back, it looked like hunters and Nature were doing their part to bring populations into line. "Then last summer, we had a terrific hatch, so all of a sudden we have a big bump in the population," reports Priebe. "Now, we have to get back to business."

And business is booming, if a hunter can predict the best days for being in the field. Brad Baker, of Williamsburg, and Terry Nims, of Davenport, hit the migration just about right, three weeks ago. The two conservation officers brought back 37 geese, after setting up in northwest Missouri on a couple days off. "We had 400, 450 decoys, mostly rags and windsocks with heads," estimated Baker. With a south wind, layout blinds and an electronic call, he said they had geese coming through all day long. "Morning and evening was better. Every half hour or so, a bunch would come through. Most of our shots were 30 to 40 yards. We were letting others go at 50, 60 yards," recalled Baker. They even downed two geese with leg bands; including one offering a \$20 reward. Biologists band geese to help determine migration routes, as well as other biological information, as the birds are harvested or recaptured.

The conservation order extends through April 15. Late hunters might even take advantage of slightly better shooting prospects. Traditionally, the nest-ready mature geese are in the early waves of migrants. Later migrating birds are often the juveniles, who are a little less wary of hunters, decoys and the ways of the world. "The key is to be out there on a flight day; one with a south wind," advises Priebe. "You can get by with 50, maybe 100 decoys, too. On a flight day, birds come by pretty regularly. So, there are lots of opportunities; sooner or later, you get lucky." Prospective hunters can hear an update of Riverton area bird estimates by calling 712-387-2032.

Biologists hope the pressure from North American hunters will whittle away numbers from those half-million bird colonies, to allow the tundra to start healing itself.

###

PREPPING FOR SPRING FISHING

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

One of my neighbors is getting a new boat. My preseason strategy learns more toward new line for a few reels. The idea is the same, even if the investment is not. It's time to start the countdown to a new fishing season.

Even with mid-March snow blanketing much of Iowa, sunny days and thawing temperatures are giving anglers the itch. Ice is receding and the gulls are moving in on the backwaters. A few warm days in a row might push the 'ice out' catfish anglers into the shallow bays to hook a few gorging cats.

Whether you are pushing the ice or just waiting for May's crappies, it's better to get caught up with your preparations now, rather than five minutes before you toss your first line in the water. "One of the most important things is fresh line on your reel. That's the thing that breaks off first in the spring, when you catch that big fish," advises Don Kline, fisheries biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "I like to clean my reels; sometimes take them apart, take a little oil, grease the gears and get those all ready to go."

From there, a lot of it depends on what condition your tackle box was left in. A variety of hooks, jigs and lures at hand give you plenty of choices, as you survey water conditions, and guess what's going to work on that particular day. I talked with a sauger fisherman a month or so ago who had almost every color worm or jig under the sun. And he swore by particular colors, depending on the day. Hey, it worked for him.

Once the care and feeding of your *tackle box* is complete, Kline addresses the 'where' factor. "You can get a fishing guide and look at some of the state lakes, maybe the smaller public lakes," suggests Kline. "I usually check within 25 to 50 miles of home and I can find probably 10 or 11 places, some of them brand new, where I haven't even fished, yet."

He likes to look at relatively new lakes. For one thing, that usually means fish have been growing well—and fast. For another, not many anglers might have heard about them, yet. "If that's the case, I can almost be assured of catching fish in a hot spot like that," proclaims Kline.

###

“ALDO LEOPOLD MONTH” BRINGS PRAIRIE RESCUE EVENTS

DES MOINES – Prairie Rescue 2006 hits full stride next month, with five events planned for the first week of April. Recently designated as “Aldo Leopold Month,” April provides the perfect opportunity to honor this nationally known, Iowa-born naturalist by volunteering in a prairie.

The April 1, 7 and 8 events are part of the seventh annual Iowa Statewide Prairie Rescue, a series of volunteer efforts to revitalize Iowa's endangered prairie habitat. This year, the events also commemorate Leopold, who advocated public understanding and protection of the environment.

At each of this year's roughly 25 events, volunteers will help care for a prairie site by removing invasive species, planting native seeds and assisting with other tasks. Upcoming events include:

- **Bear Creek National Restoration and Demonstration Watershed, April 1:** Volunteers should meet at 8 a.m. at Anderson's Meat and Grocery, in Roland.
- **Richard Pohl Memorial Prairie Preserve, April 1:** Volunteers should meet at 9 a.m. at this 25-acre prairie preserve located on the west side of Ames High School.
- **Stone State Park, April 1:** Volunteers should meet at 8 a.m. at the Mt. Lookout site near the park's east entrance. Bring handsaws, loppers and gloves.
- **Volga River State Recreation Area, April 7:** Volunteers should meet at the park office at 10 a.m. and will cut cedar trees and brush. Bring tools and gloves.
- **Brushy Creek State Recreation Area, April 8:** Volunteers should meet at the park office at 9 a.m. The event may include a prairie burn, along with brush removal.

Visit www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/pr06.html for more details about these and other events. Rescues occur throughout April and in early May.

Prairie rescues give volunteers the chance to protect what remains of Iowa's beautiful prairie habitat. Native grasslands once covered 70-percent of the state but has been reduced to 0.1-percent of their original size. The remnants, scattered in small patches throughout the state, now require professional and volunteer assistance to survive.

For more information, contact Sarah West at Sarah.West@dnr.state.ia.us or at (515) 281- 6271 or Cathy Engstrom at cengstrom@inhf.org or at (515) 288-1846.

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DNR SPRING SALE SET FOR MAY 13

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR will hold a spring auction Saturday, May 13, at the Cattle Barn on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The gates open at 8 a.m. and the auction will begin around 9 a.m. The public may view the items for sale on May 11 and 12, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

New this year is a 10 percent buyer's premium that will be added to all sales. The premium is the fee paid for the auctioneer. For example, if the winning bid is \$20, the buyer will pay a 10 percent premium, or \$2, added to the bid after taxes, so the payment would be \$20, plus 6 percent sales tax, \$1.20, plus the premium fee, \$2, or \$23.20.

Items up for auction include firearms, boats, outboard motors, chainsaws, mowers, trailers, farm and office equipment and more. The items are sold “as is” with no guarantee or warranty.

Any person interested in purchasing a firearm at the auction must have either a valid Iowa permit to acquire pistols or revolvers, a federal firearms license, or a professional or non-professional permit to carry concealed weapons. The Iowa permit to acquire can be obtained from a sheriff’s office. Allow two to three weeks to receive the permit.

Payment must be made on auction day. All sales are final. Firearms must be removed from the site within one half hour after the sale of the firearm is completed. All other items must be removed from the sale site after full payment is made.

Sales taxes will be collected. Boats, snowmobiles, trailers and vehicles will pay taxes to the proper county office when registering those items.

The Iowa DNR reserves the right to reject any bids and withdraw any item from the sale at any time. A bill of sale will be available April 1. To receive a copy of the sale bill, send an email to susan.davenport@dnr.state.ia.us or a self addressed stamped envelop to Surplus Sale, Iowa DNR, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50319.

###

PLANT NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS FOR BEST RESULTS

AMES - As the days begin to warm, Iowans start thinking about planting trees and shrubs. But what species of trees and or shrubs should you plant? While exotic non native flowering or fancy colored trees and shrubs species may have an exciting appeal, using native trees and shrub seedlings from an Iowa grown nursery is best for all concerned.

“Native trees and shrubs are better adapted to Iowa’s extremes in weather and to Iowa soils, providing superior native wildlife habitat,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. “Native plants have adapted themselves over time with insect and disease issues, and they are less likely to be stressed than non-native plants during extreme weather events such as late freezes or droughts, and they do offer tremendous spring flowering and fall color opportunities.”

Prior to settlement, Iowa contained 6.7 million acres of forest with a mixture of oaks, hickories, maples and others.

“Today, with 2.7 million acres of forestland, Iowans can still take pride in growing some of the worlds finest hardwoods, like black walnut, oak, ash, cottonwood,

sycamore and silver maple,” Walkowiak said. “Whether you are planting trees to grow forest products, to increase or improve wildlife habitat, stop erosion or to improve the overall landscape, native trees and shrubs offer the best chance for success. You should pick and choose species according to your land management objectives and your planting site.”

The State Forest Nursery, in Ames, produces hardy, native trees and shrubs at affordable costs. The State Nursery buys its native seeds from local Iowa seed collectors each year to ensure the planting stock will withstand Iowa’s land and weather conditions. By providing a reliable source of suitable planting stock in large quantities, the State Forest Nursery produces four million bare root seedlings per year for sale to private landowners for reforestation, soil erosion control and wildlife habitat.

Good sources for information about native trees and shrubs are your local DNR district foresters, private lands biologists, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, County Conservation Boards or county extension agents or check out www.iowatreeplanting.com.

The State Forest Nursery has a good supply of native shrubs and small trees perfect for wildlife habitat projects – for the backyard, small acreage or large planting. Call 800-865-2477 or visit www.iowadnr.com/forestry/ for more information.

For more information contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966 or john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us

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